



**GUIDELINES**  
**FOR**  
**MARINE TURTLE PERMIT HOLDERS**  
  
**~ Stranding and Salvage ~**

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## INFORMATION FOR MARINE TURTLE PERMIT HOLDERS

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) issues permits for activities involving marine turtles in South Carolina under authority granted to the state through Cooperative Agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). All activities must be authorized under Chapter 15 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. Each permit consists of a principal permit holder, qualified personnel with Letter of Authorization (LOA), and a list of authorized activities. Permit holders are expected to know the conditions and responsibilities associated with their permit. Principal permit holders are responsible for ensuring that SCDNR staff or an experienced permit holder thoroughly and properly trains all personnel with LOA's listed under their permit. Permit holders are authorized to conduct specific activities depending upon experience, area of investigation and/or demonstrated marine turtle management needs. Only those activities specifically listed on the permit are authorized.

A permit issued by the SCDNR or a letter of authorization (LOA) from the permit holder must be in the possession of each person at all times while conducting authorized activities. You should also carry identification that will verify that you are the named permit holder. Some wildlife or public safety officers or concerned individuals may perceive that your activity is harmful or unlawful. Please ensure that your response to such situations is thoughtful and reflects the special responsibilities associated with your permit.

## STRANDING AND SALVAGE

This activity involves the collection of information on turtles that become stranded on land, whether dead or alive. All permit holders participating in this program are required to complete a Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN) report for each turtle encountered. Reports should be mailed upon completion to South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, DuBose Griffin, State Coordinator, PO Box 12559, Charleston, SC, 29422. Additional STSSN reports should be requested through the State Coordinator's office or printed from the DNR Marine Turtle website at [www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/). Go to Management - SC Volunteer Program - Volunteer Resources. Maps are at the bottom of the webpage. **Please do not Xerox your own reports.** If you are authorized to conduct stranding/salvage activities, you may transport stranded turtles (live or dead) within the state of South Carolina. You may **not** transfer turtles or turtle parts out of the state without prior written approval from SCDNR.

To maintain consistency and data quality, only highly experienced personnel with explicit training from SCDNR should conduct STSSN activities. A permit holder may **not** authorize additional personnel to conduct STSSN activities without approval from SCDNR. All personnel conducting STSSN activities shall follow instructions and guidelines circulated by SCDNR. Consult your network newsletter, "Loggerheadlines" for any changes and announcements. Please note carefully the following additional permit requirements:

1. Any turtle under 18" (45cm) in carapace (shell) length shall be retained until you speak with someone in the SCDNR turtle program at Fort Johnson or Green Pond about the specific case.
2. Any green turtle, hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, or unidentified turtle shall be retained until you speak with someone in the SCDNR turtle program at either Fort Johnson or Green Pond about the specific case.
3. Any turtle entangled in any material or noted as having ingested any material shall be retained until you speak with someone in the SCDNR program at either Fort Johnson or Green Pond. If SCDNR (or their designee) will not be collecting the turtle, please photograph it, then remove and retain the entangling material.
4. Our office will provide a map of your local area, or you may print one from the DNR Marine Turtle website. **This map is to be included with each stranding report showing the exact location of the stranding.** If the volunteer has a GPS unit he should record his Lat/Long only in the Comments section of the report.

## COMPLETING THE STSSN STRANDING REPORT

The following information is provided to assist with the proper completion of the STSSN reporting report. Permit holders conducting stranding and salvage activities shall be familiar with the following information and shall complete all boxes on the report. Write legibly.

**OBSERVER'S NAME/ADDRESS/PHONE:** This is the person who handles and documents the turtle in the field. It is not the person who reports the turtle to you. Please include your full name with middle initial if you have one. Records are indexed by observer initials. We may need to contact you for clarification of the reported data; please give us an affiliation (volunteer at Edisto Turtle Project, etc.) address and phone number(s) where you can be reached.

**STRANDING DATE:** This is the date the stranded turtle is first sighted. If you did not investigate until a later date, please make that known in the remarks section. Turtle Number by Day: This is used to keep track if more than one turtle is investigated on a single day, on the same beach/island, by the same stranding observer. Your first turtle of the day is 01, second of the same day is 02, third of the same day is 03, etc. Notification of the State Coordinator is new. Please remember to check it.

**SPECIES:** Mark the box for the species. The key on the back can help you identify the species. If you code a turtle as "unidentified" you must include a photograph, salvage the specimen, and contact SCDNR by telephone before you bury or otherwise dispose of the carcass. Take photos if you are unsure of the species. If the species is verified by the South Carolina STSSN Coordinator (or some other biologist with SCDNR) check yes, if not, check no. *Save the skull for identification.* If we cannot collect the carcass that day, pull it above the high tide line so that it will not wash away.

Very little is known about leatherback turtles' food habits and age (size) at sexual maturity. Our staff would like to perform necropsies on as many animals as possible, even if they are not fresh. We need your cooperation for this. Do not have the carcass buried until you have spoken with our staff.

**SEX:** Generally, loggerheads, green turtles, and hawksbills under 90cm (35") carapace length should be considered immature if a long tail is not present. Over 90 cm with a short tail should be

considered female. However, between 76-90cm (30-36in) there must be some indication as to why a particular sex was circled. Otherwise the sex will be considered “undetermined”. If you circle male or female, please explain how you reached that decision in the next box. If a necropsy was performed and the sex was determined internally, check that box. You must give a measurement for the length of the tail. Either it extends beyond the posterior edge of the carapace or it does not. If you circle male or female and do not give a valid reason, the sex will be entered as undetermined. Measure only the tail, not the bloated or distended cloaca. *Remember, immature sea turtles cannot be sexed externally!*

**STRANDING LOCATION:** Offshore or inshore are new boxes, do not forget to check them off. State where stranding occurred. County where stranding occurred. Descriptive location (Be specific). Mark the stranding location on the map supplied by the State Coordinator's office or printed from the website. **Always write the name of the island or beach first.** Local names or landmarks not found on nautical charts do not help us pinpoint a location. Good reference points are inlets, county lines, state boundaries, cape points, major roads that intersect the beach, etc. An example of a good, descriptive location is: 1.5 miles north of the pier on Folly Beach. The stranding location is one of the most important data items on the report. We must be able to distinguish between offshore strandings (ocean beaches) and inshore strandings (bays/sounds/rivers). **Do not use a nest protection project's markers as landmarks.** Latitude/Longitude will be completed by the State Coordinator's office using the map and GIS.

**CONDITION OF TURTLE:** Mark the condition of the turtle the time it was first seen (carcasses can “ripen” quickly in summer). If the turtle seems intermediate between two stages of decomposition, pick the one that fits best. (If you specify two conditions, we will pick one, and we have never seen the turtle you are reporting.) If it smells bad at all, it is not fresh.

**TAGS:** Check the turtle for tags or indications of lost tags. All flippers should be thoroughly checked and the margin of the carapace should be checked as well. If you encounter a stranded turtle with a tag, you must contact SCDNR by telephone before you dispose of the animal. Researchers depend heavily on these rare events to learn important things about turtles. There may be something specific that needs to be done with the carcass. We may want to collect skeletal parts or the whole animal. Do not dispose of a tagged carcass until you get the okay from SCDNR. If you are instructed by SCDNR to dispose of the carcass, always remove the tags. List the tag number(s) and location (e.g., left front flipper) and return address. Enclose the tags in a padded envelope and submit them, along with the stranding report, to the State Coordinator. Notches or round holes on the trailing edge of flippers up near the shell or round holes in the edge of the shell should be noted as tag scars. Other types of tags are now included on the report. PIT and wire tags require special equipment for detection. Living tags should be reported to SCDNR for verification.

**FINAL DISPOSITION:** These codes refer to what you did with the stranded turtle. Even though there is a code for unpainted, left on beach (Code 5), **you should never leave a turtle unpainted on the beach.** At the very least, paint the turtle and move it out of reach of the tide. The preferred method is to paint it and then have the local sanitation department remove the carcass or bury the turtle. Make contact with sanitation and/or security people in your area to let them know whom to contact before carcasses are removed/buried. If it is to be buried, you should locate a spot **off** the active turtle nesting beach to avoid digging into a nest. If you leave a carcass on a remote beach, you may have to repaint it as the scutes begin to fall off. Codes 1-5 refer to dead turtles only. Codes 6 and 7 are for live animals. If you use code 6 (alive, released) please say where and when you released it. If you use code 7 (alive, taken to holding facility) please note that it was given to SCDNR in the remarks section. Codes 8 and 9 are new, as is

recording the paint color. If none of the disposition codes fit the event you are reporting, please explain what you did with the animal in the REMARKS section.

**CARAPACE MEASUREMENTS:** There are 3 measurements over the curve on this report. All *curved* measurements are taken with a flexible tape measure. Write the measurements in inches *unless* you have a metric tape measure. The Coordinator's office will convert inches to centimeters. Methods of obtaining standard carapace measurements are depicted on the top diagram. Please specify on the STSSN report if the measurements are taken from/to the same points as the diagram. Please indicate if the measurements are estimates. If measurements are estimates or cannot be taken, please give reason (damage to shell, skeleton falling apart, etc.).

Curved length is taken from the center of the nuchal (where the skin attaches to the shell) to the distal point of the longest posterior marginal.

*Leatherbacks only:* Curved length measurements are made alongside the midline ridge, because of irregularities in the ridge and the difficulty of keeping the tape on the ridge.

Minimum length is taken at the center of the nuchal to the center of the posterior notch. Not all species or sizes of turtles will have a notch.

Curved width is taken at the widest point and perpendicular to the longitudinal body axis. The widest point may be forward of "halfway" down the carapace.

**REMARKS:** This is a space for your notes. The more information you give us, the easier it will be for us to code the record. Always note anything unusual about a stranding event. We will code these remarks onto each turtle's record. DO NOT SPECULATE ABOUT A CAUSE OF DEATH, UNLESS YOU ARE A PATHOLOGIST OR HAVE CONDUCTED A NECROPSY OF THE ANIMAL. Use the diagram on the STSSN report to indicate flipper damage, carapace wounds, tag locations, or anything else you want us to know about the turtle. It is also important to note if nothing was unusual.

**SUBMITTING STSSN REPORT REPORTS:** The National Marine Fisheries Service has written a "SEA TURTLE/SHRIMP FISHERY EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN". The number of weekly strandings in a designated area may trigger certain law enforcement actions and restrictions to the fishery. In order to have "real time" reporting, we are asking that you telephone or e-mail your reports in to the Charleston office as soon as possible. The State Coordinator must send in weekly totals to NMFS no later than every **Monday** morning. We will accept collect calls at 843-953-9015 during business hours (Mon-Fri: 8:30 am - 5:00 pm). You may use this same number and leave a message on phone mail at any hour if it is a regular call, not collect. If you prefer e-mail, use: [bundoe@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:bundoe@dnr.sc.gov).

If it is a very fresh carcass and/or an unusual species (not loggerhead), use the hotline number (1-800-922-5431) and ask the dispatcher to get a message to DuBose Griffin, Charlotte Hope.

Please enclose the STSSN report form **inside an envelope** for mailing. The reports tend to tear if they are mailed by themselves. Please do not hold reports and delay mailing them, it is critical that we keep our database current. The timely submission of stranding reports makes a difference for sea turtle conservation!

**DO NOT leave an unpainted turtle on the beach**



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